

## Russia's Great Game Stratagem toward the Korean Peninsula Revisited: Lessons from the Failure of Imperial Russia\*

Se Hyun Ahn

*This paper explores Imperial Russia's Great Game Stratagem toward the Korean Peninsula and Russo-Japanese rivalry as well as Korea's position in the balancing of power relations. Reconsidering the imperial Russian foreign policy toward Korea in the late 19th century and the early 20th century is essential to understanding the current policy of Russia toward the Korean peninsula and the dynamics of East Asian relations. Both the outcome and behavior of imperial Russian policy toward East Asia resembles in many ways those of the post Imperial Russian policy. This is because the perceptions that Russia and Korea developed about each other during that period still shape Russia's foreign policy today. Perhaps, the best way to look at imperial Russia's strategy toward the peninsula is to examine Russia's behavior toward other great powers that were involved in the game of balancing power in Northeast Asia during that period. Finally, this paper delivers the crucial lesson for future Korean leadership and Korean diplomacy in the region.*

**Keywords:** Korea, Russia, Japan, Great Game, East Asia, Diplomacy

### INTRODUCTION

Today's international geo-strategic posture over the Korean Peninsula resembles the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in many ways. The New Great Game is taking place over the Korean Peninsula. The Korean Peninsula is experiencing another turmoil over North Korea's nuclear proliferation issue, as if the old great Great Game had taken place over Komun Island in the region during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The surrounding nations including the six party member states are playing their own games and all the while they are not abiding by strict alliance rules. Balance of power relations has been the dominant force shaping Northeast Asia over past several centuries. And the Korean Peninsula has been always traditionally the battle ground and a scapegoat in the midst of balance of power relations. This fact has been also typically reflected by the inherent incompetence of Korean government since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today's South Korean government is also very shaky both in terms of domestic politics and foreign policy arena due to the ambiguity, incoherency, and the lack of confidence that the current South Korean government keeps manifesting. Even North Korea's nuclear threat has amplified the complexities of Northeast Asian politics and the Korean Peninsula. It is safe to say that the current situation over the Korean Peninsula is even more unstable and dangerous than that of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Meanwhile, Russia's power has not been traditionally influential over the Korean Peninsula. And yet Russia continues to take the role of spoiler at least from the South Korean perspective. In order to understand Russia's position and philosophy toward the region, it is essential to trace back to the pre-Russo- Japanese war period. Russia's current position in

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the region is rather weak, compared to that of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet Russia's stratagem has not substantially changed.

In this sense, reconsidering the imperial Russian foreign policy toward Korea in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is an essential task to understanding the current policy of Russia toward the Korean peninsula. Both the outcome and behavior of imperial Russian policy toward East Asia resembles in many ways those of the post Imperial Russian policy. This is because the perceptions that Russia and Korea developed about each other during that period still continues to shape Russia's foreign policy today. Perhaps, the best way to look at imperial Russia's strategy toward the peninsula is to examine Russia's behavior toward other great powers that were involved in the game of balancing power in Northeast Asia during that period.

Korea has long been a battleground of rival ambitions due to its strategic importance. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, internal strife between the reformists and the extreme conservatives and inept administration led by incapable leadership made Korea's location a liability for her people as foreign troops despoiled the land. Neighboring states such as China, Japan and Russia, along with Western powers including Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States desired to take advantage of the weakness of Korea as much as possible and to be the most influential power in this Great Game.

Throughout the struggle among the great powers over weak Korea, Russia and Japan were the most competitive contenders in this Game. However, Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 provided it with a great opportunity to be the most dominant player in this gambit than any other great power. Accordingly, Russia eventually lost total control of Korea. Russian policy failed in Korea not only because it lost to Japan, but also because Russian pretensions in Korea up to 1905 came to nothing. Russian pretensions in Korea suffered from vacillation of policies, unpredictable personalities, insincerity in its diplomatic conduct, lack of military clout in the Far East, and the distrust of the Korean people.

This paper is comprised of largely six parts. The first outlines the general features of the Great Game in Korea. Accordingly, the following issues will be addressed: 1) the origin and the background of the Game, 2) the players in this Game, and 3) the reasons why the Game took place in Korea? The Komun Island (Port Hamilton) incident is the subject of the second part of this paper. The third part will discuss the two major events in this Great Game: the Tong-hak (eastern learning) peasant rebellion and the Sino-Japanese War. In this part, the role of Russia in the Sino-Japanese War and the impact of the War on Russian policy in Korea will be particularly highlighted. The fourth part will examine how Russian influence in Korea at first increased and then declined after 1895 and how Russo-Japanese rivalry developed in this Game up to 1904. The fifth segment concerning the Russo-Japanese War, sets out with the following questions: 1) its cause, 2) reasons why Japan won, 3) its nature, and 4) its implication for Korea. Finally, Russian interests in Korea after the Russo-Japanese War will be assessed. The conclusion of the paper will attempt to evaluate Russian performance in this Great Game, and to explain why Russia eventually turned out to be an unsuccessful contender.

## 2. THE GREAT GAME IN KOREA

### 2.1. Background

Although the Great Game in Korea turned out to be a major battle between Russia and Japan in the end, the deepest roots of the Great Game in Korea lay not so much in the East Asia but in Europe, as was in the case of Crimean War. The opening of Korea to diplomatic and commercial relations led to its involvement in the conflicts between Western powers which had interests in East Asia. Among them, one of the most important of these was that between Great Britain and Russia. British power in Asia was primarily focused on India, but the vital British trade with China brought frequent and not always friendly contacts with the expanding Russian Empire. There had been chronic hostility between the two nations ever since the Crimean War of 1856, and Britain viewed the expanding power of the Russian Empire in Asia not only as a threat to its own interests but also as a threat to the balance of power in Europe at the time. When the Russians reached the Pacific and installed the port in Vladivostok within easy reach of Korea's northeastern frontier in 1860, Korea inevitably became a focal point in this rivalry.<sup>1</sup> It was Great Britain that stirred China to action, to tighten her control as the age-old suzerain when there was a report that Korea might become a Russian protectorate in 1885.<sup>2</sup> This renewed interference by China in Korea excited Japan, and finally led, a decade later in 1895, to war between the two contenders.

As time went by, the Great Britain lost its strategic and economic interests in Korea. After the treaty of Shimonoseki which settled the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, the apparent contenders in the Far East turned out to be Russia and Japan.<sup>3</sup> However, when efforts to settle the issue of spheres of influence in both China and the Middle East with Russia failed, Great Britain signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, breaking the English diplomatic tradition of splendid isolation of the nineteenth century and positively sided with Japan.

In 1894 Korea became the target of concession seekers. By the end of 1895 China had absolute control over the telegraph franchise; Japan had obtained vast fishing rights as well as a monopoly over production of paper, the mint, glassworks, and other enterprises; citizens of the United States held concessions in coastal trade, pearl fisheries, electric power in Seoul, timber grants, and a gold-mining concession in the entire Unsan district of the province of Pyongan, which for forty years proved to be the most profitable and the largest out of all the concessionary enterprises in Korea.<sup>4</sup>

Although a number of countries were involved in the Great Game in Korea, the major contenders were China, Japan and Russia. The first phase of this Great Game ended with the victory of Japan over China in 1895 and the proclamation of Korean independence. The second phase also ended with the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 and the eventual Japanese annexation of Korea.<sup>5</sup> In particular, each of the two players during the second phase

<sup>1</sup> Han, Woo Keun, *The History of Korea* (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1987), p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> Malozemoff, Andrew, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), pp. 27-36.

<sup>3</sup> Nish, Ian H., *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 22-28.

<sup>4</sup> Harrington, Fred Harvey. *God, Mammon, and the Japanese*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1944.), pp. 144, 146, 156, 158.

<sup>5</sup> Lensen, George Alexander, *Korea and Manchuria Between Russia and Japan 1895- 1904* (Tallahassee,

of the game had an ally as well as a sympathizer. Russia had France as an ally and Germany as a sympathizer, while Japan had the Great Britain as an ally and the United States as a sympathizer.

### 3. GEO-POLITICAL VALUE OF KOREA

International rivalry over Korea in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was due in part to its strategic importance. Strategic value is closely related to national security conceptions because it provides visions and beliefs about how security is best attained. Depending on the definition of national security, strategic value can range from political issues to economic, resource-related, environmental, and demographic issues. Some locations and some countries are strategically important because of their intrinsic value. When such areas become vital to another nation's survival or interests, that nation maneuvers to gain control over those area. The Korean peninsula was an example of such an area. It is a bridge between the continent and Japan; it borders onto China and Russia by land and onto Japan by sea; it possesses ice-free ports and as a result, was in a position to facilitate or hinder Russian access to the Pacific. From the Russian strategic perspective, Korea represented a buffer zone against which an ocean power could prevent Korea from becoming a stepping stone for the approaching invader.

To a large extent, international rivalry in Korea, as mentioned previously, was encouraged by the weakness, corruption, and division of the Korean government. Korean disunity provided an opportunity for foreign interference and the various Powers deemed it necessary to prevent each other's control of the region. Koreans did seek to strengthen their own hands by playing the foreigners against each other. Nevertheless, Korea was too weak to do so with much success at that time. And Japanese interference in the internal affairs of Korea during the transition decade climaxed in 1895 with the assassination of the Queen. The height of Russian influence was reached the following year as a direct result of this outrageous incident, when the Korean King sought refuge from the Japanese by seeking protection inside the Russian legation. Russian attempts to establish a settlement at the Korean port of Masampo aroused international concern.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. KOMUN ISLANG (PORT HAMILTON) INCIDENT

#### 4.1 The beginning of the Great Game

Komun Island incident in 1885 was the beginning of the Great Game in Korea. As Anglo-Russian rivalry had spread from the Near East and Central Asia to the Far East and as the possibility of war between Russia and Great Britain increased, the British had decided to acquire another Pacific naval base for fear that Chinese neutrality might deprive them of the use of Chinese ports in the event of hostilities.<sup>7</sup> They had chosen Komun Island because they

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Florida: The Diplomatic Press, 1966), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Lensen, *Korea and Manchuria...* pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Narochitskii, *Kolonial'naiapolitikakapitalisticheskikhderzhavna Dal'nemVostoke*, 1860-1895. Moscow, pp. 376-377., citing Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue*, p. 54.

thought of it as the key to the Korean Strait.<sup>8</sup> Komun Island was a spacious yet well-sheltered harbor formed by three islands off the southern tip of Korea. It is often called Port Hamilton, since it was named after the secretary of the British Admiralty, Lord George Hamilton, by an English surveyor in 1845.<sup>9</sup>

In April 1885, the British occupied Komun Island, notifying the Korean government after the fact, arguing that their government had found it necessary, in view of certain eventualities, to authorize the temporary occupation of the port.<sup>10</sup> They justified their action to the world as a move to prevent probable occupation of the island by another power. The British Admiralty reasoned: To Russia it would afford an important depot and naval port, free from ice at all seasons, and in this respect far superior to Vladivostok," even though rumors of a secret Russo-Korean agreement and warnings of possible Russian seizure of Port Hamilton had not reached London until after the decision had been made by the cabinet.<sup>11</sup>

The British occupation of Komun Island was directly motivated by Russia's breach of its agreement with the Great Britain over the Afghanistan question. On March 30, 1885, local Russian authorities broke their pledge to refrain from further advances on the Afghan frontier until the joint Anglo-Russian commission could finish the delimitation of the new northern border of Afghanistan, precipitating an acute crisis in Anglo-Russian relations.<sup>12</sup> Roused to a fever pitch, Great Britain prepared for war.<sup>13</sup> Among other measures, it chose to follow a traditional strategic plan – to attack Russia at some weak point in Russia's far-flung possessions.<sup>14</sup> The Royal Navy was placed on full alert, with instructions to monitor the movements of all Russian warships. In the Far East the fleet was ordered to occupy Port Hamilton in Korea so that it might be used as a base for operations against the great Russian naval stronghold at Vladivostok and other targets in the North Pacific.<sup>15</sup> The occupation of these islands would advance the British fleet 1,200 miles farther from their nearest base at Hong Kong and would bring it within easy operating distance of Vladivostok, which was only 850 miles from the port.<sup>16</sup>

The Russians immediately protested, and threatened that, if this move had been made

<sup>8</sup> Vice Admiral Sir William Dowell to secretary of the Admiralty, Audacious at Nagasaki, May 28, 1885, A Confidential, EA, FO 405-36, p. 4; Memorandum by Sir E. Hertslet on the Importance of Port Hamilton (Korea), Feb. 5, 1885, EA, FO 405-35, p.1., in Park, Il-Keun, *Anglo-American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea 1866-1886*, (Seoul, Korea: Shin Mun Dang Publishing Company, 1982), p. 488.

<sup>9</sup> Confidential. Correspondence respecting the Temporary Occupation of Port Hamilton by Her Majesty's Government. A Memorandum by Sir E. Hertslet on the Importance of Port Hamilton (Korea), E. H., in Park, p. 488.

<sup>10</sup> Earl Granville to Mr. O'Connor, No. 84. Confidential. Ext. 15. Foreign Office, April 23, 1885., in Park's *Anglo American Diplomatic Materials Relating to Korea.*, p. 492.

<sup>11</sup> Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue*, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Allen G., James, "Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1865-1885" (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1936), particularly chaps. 10 and 11., citing Malozemoff, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 29., and William Habberton, *Anglo-Russian Relations Concerning Afghanistan, 1837-1907* (Urbana, University of Illinois, 1937), pp. 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Malozemoff, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Hopkirk, Peter, *The Great Game*, p. 429.

<sup>16</sup> Malozemoff, p. 29.

with Chinese approval, they would occupy another part of Korea, Quelpart (Cheju) Island, as compensation.<sup>17</sup> The Korean government also protested through China. Negotiations there upon began between Britain and Russia with Chinese mediation, and Britain agreed to withdraw. Withdrawal was very slow, however, and the last British forces did not leave Komun Island until 1887, after Russia had given assurances that it would not occupy any Korean territory and China had promised not to approve the occupation of any part of Korea by any nation.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.2 Implications for Russia

In this first encounter, Korea's independence was saved by intense Russo-British rivalry, but Russia's interest had once and for all been aroused. In 1888, in a secret memorandum, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlined its conception of the Korean situation: since the country was under Chinese influence, it was essential for Russia to oppose China in Korea and to work toward Korea's independence from Peking. In this respect Russian policy coincided with that of Japan. Great Britain was opposed, as was China, to Russian advances in the Far East, and was considered another opponent. The line-up of powers in Korea appeared to be: Russia and Japan against Britain and China.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the Komun Island incident reversed the naval policy of Russia in the Far East and thus led indirectly to the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Moreover, it demonstrated how easily the Russian Far Eastern fleet could be blocked in the Sea of Japan. In time of war, Russian warships would not be able to use natural ports; the Russian fleet would therefore be forced into a defensive role for lack of coaling stations. In addition, the fleet would be useless against Great Britain, since it was not strong enough to defeat the China fleet of the British; yet the fortifications of Vladivostok and its garrison secured it against any *coup de main* that might be attempted by the British fleet. In 1887 Russia adopted a new defensive policy for her Far Eastern possessions. This depended on land forces rather than naval strength. The Far Eastern fleet was reduced to a minimum.<sup>20</sup> Vladivostok declined in importance as a naval base, and by 1888 it was reported to be almost deserted in comparison with its original state during the brief period of Russian naval supremacy in the Far East in 1879-1880.<sup>21</sup>

As part of the new policy, the vessels of the Volunteer Fleet were placed under the control of the Ministry of Naval Affairs and were once more equipped to act as destroyers of commerce in time of war.<sup>22</sup> The Russian government then took direct control of the maintenance of its communications from European Russia to the Far East. Only when the

<sup>17</sup> Cheju Island is situated between Cheju Strait and the East China Sea. It is one of the most famous resort area in Asia., NovoeVremia, August. 20, 1885, as translated in EA, FO 405-35, p. 112., citing Lensen, Balance of Intrigue, p. 58., and Han, p. 397.

<sup>18</sup> Han, p. 397.

<sup>19</sup> Dallin, David J., The Rise of Russia in Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Matiunin, N. G. NashisosedinakrainemVostoke, VestnikEvropy, XXII, No. 7 (July, 1887), p. 82., citing Malozemoff, pp. 33-34.

<sup>21</sup> P. Chikhachev, KaliforniiaiUssuriiskiikrai, VestnikEvropy XXV, No. 6 (June, 1890), p. 562., citing Malozemoff, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Zepelin, op. cit., I, 211; U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, General Information Series, VI, Recent Naval Intelligence, June, 1887 (Washington, 1887), pp. 287-288., citing Ibid., p. 34.

Trans-Siberian Railway was in operation across the continent of Asia was the Volunteer Fleet returned to its civil status.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. THE YEAR OF 1894: THE TONG-HAK REBELLION AND THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR

### 5.1 The Tong-hak Peasant Rebellion

In June, 1894, the second Tong-hak Rebellion in Korea plunged the Far East into a new era of intensive international rivalry.<sup>24</sup> The Tong-hak (Eastern Learning) society's main aim was to drive all foreign influence from Korea and reform the government of Korea by the Koreans.<sup>25</sup> The first rebellion of 1893 aroused only slight international interest because the Tong-haks were crushed by the Korean government before American, Japanese, Chinese, British, and German warships could land at Chemulpo (the port for the capital, Seoul).<sup>26</sup> However, in March, 1894, equipped with arms from Japan and backed by Japanese *ronin* (hired gangsters and soldiers of fortune),<sup>27</sup> the Tong-haks quickly spread through the southern Korean provinces. In May they defeated government forces sent against them, and in June they once again threatened the capital.<sup>28</sup> British, French, Japanese, and Chinese warships

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., op.cit., I, 212.

<sup>24</sup> Malozemoff, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> The despair and misery of the Korean people in the nineteenth century found expression in the Tong-hak Society. Some of the members of this society were robbers, but many were men who had been driven to desperation by oppression and who had determined to put up a fight for better conditions at any cost to themselves. The movement began as a religious reformation. Its founder, Choi CheiOu, who had seen something of the Roman Catholic missionaries and had vaguely discerned some of their teachings, alleged that he had a vision in 1859 at his home in Kyong-ju, in southern Korea. He forthwith proclaimed a new faith which included cherry-picked elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Romanism, and which he called Tong-hak, or Eastern learning. Followers multiplied. Loyal at first to the dynasty, the hostility of the government and the sorrows of the people developed the Tong-haks into revolutionaries. Convinced that foreign influences were undermining the ancient institutions of the country and arousing the anger of the gods, the Tong-haks were avowedly anti-foreign. They strenuously urged the preservation of the old ways, and presented appeals to the throne calling for the extermination of foreign invaders, the cutting of all relations with other nations, and the prohibition of alien religions. The movement quickly became a menacing one and it climaxed in 1894 and helped to precipitate the Sino-Japanese War. From time to time, the Tong-haks issued inflammatory proclamations, which usually stated in plain languages the grievances of the people, arraigned the magistrates as cruel and corrupt, and called for reforms in every department of the government. Oda, Shogo., ChosensiTaikei (Seoul: Korean Historical Society, 1929), pp.118-121.

<sup>26</sup> Akagi, R. H. Japan's Foreign Relations, 1542-1935. (Tokyo: Hokseido Press, 1936). op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> A. Heard, China and Japan in Korea, North American Review, XIX (1894), pp. 300-308. By 1894, the Japanese were becoming exasperated by the strong Chinese political influence prevailing in Korean government, and were willing to make use of the Tong-haks. The Tong-haks in turn were glad to receive assistance from Japan in arms and soldiers for their attempt which failed in the previous year.

<sup>28</sup> Telegram, Cassini to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 5, 1894, K.A., L-LI, 7-8.



again assembled at Chemulpo, and even Russia belatedly sent a gunboat.<sup>29</sup>

On June 2 the King of Korea made a formal request for Chinese intervention, and on June 7 the Tsungli Yamen notified Komura, the Japanese Charge d' Affaires at Peking, that China would send troops to Korea to restore the peace of our tributary state.<sup>30</sup> Japan in return notified China that the latter had never recognized Korea as a tributary state of the Chinese empire.<sup>31</sup> In accordance with the Tientsin Convention of 1885, both China and Japan proceeded to send troops to Korea. Before many units arrived, the Korean government had managed to subjugate the rebels; nevertheless, both countries continued to send more troops.<sup>32</sup>

The Korean government now asked both Japan and China to withdraw their troops from Korea. Japan, however, had set forth a new program on June 22, which indicated that Japanese troops would not withdraw until Korea reformed her administration.<sup>33</sup> According to the official Chinese statement made to Count A. P. Cassini, the Russian Charge d' Affaires at Peking, the Japanese made several offers which would have given both China and Japan control of the Korean government, but China refused them, faithfully adhering to the Russo-Chinese understanding of October, 1886 (Li-Lodyzhensky Agreement).<sup>34</sup>

## 5.2 The Sino- Japanese War: outbreak and the implication for Korea

War broke out on July 25, 1894 with an unprovoked attack upon Chinese ships in the Yellow Sea near Asan Bay, which were sunk or driven off. Simultaneously, Japanese troops marched south from Seoul to attack Chinese units in Asan and Kyongju, who they defeated on July 29. The remnant of the Chinese force retreated north by a circuitous route to Pyongyang, where they joined other forces sent from China. The Sino-Japanese war began with a swift series of victories for Japan.<sup>35</sup>

China had a population of over 300 million as compared with Japan's 40 million, but Japan was far superior to China in armed forces and it took her only eight months to inflict a decisive defeat on the Chinese. Japan transmitted to China peace terms which included: independence for Korea; annexation by Japan of the islands of Formosa and the Pescadores; payment of a war indemnity of 200 million taels by China; and, finally, cession of the tip of Liaotung Peninsula, in Manchuria, with Port Arthur, to Japan. China had no choice but to accept these terms. Japan emerged as the first non-European Great Power in modern history.<sup>36</sup>

With the Chinese gone and her own forces helpless, Korea was now forced to sign a series of agreements that placed her virtually under Japanese rule. The Japanese obtained rights to build railroads and telegraph systems. All ports on the Cholla coast were opened to Japan. A treaty of military alliance was signed which in effect made Korea a source of Japanese military supplies. All Chinese residents were to be deported. Korea was completely

<sup>29</sup> Malozemoff, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> Akagi, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 342-343.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 137-138.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Malozemoff, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> Han, p. 411.

<sup>36</sup> Dallin, p. 38.



in Japanese hands.<sup>37</sup>

### 5.3 Russia's performance

It is interesting to note that it was the Russian menace that prompted Japan to go war with China over Korea in 1894. By that time the Trans-Siberian was under construction, and within a few years a direct railroad, capable of carrying not only goods but regiments of troops and heavy artillery, would connect St. Petersburg and Moscow with Vladivostok. In order to secure at least a buffer between herself and Russia and, if possible, bring Korea under her control, Japan was prepared to wage war on China. Witte stated that, the war which Japan conducted in 1894-1895 is the consequence of the construction of the Siberian Railway.<sup>38</sup> The British envoy in Japan also summed up the causes of the conflict in a confidential report to London: Whatever the ostensible reason for that the main object was to anticipate the completion of the Siberian Railway and to prevent Russia from gaining free access to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>39</sup>

Immediately following the Japanese victory, the acquisition by Japan of a strategic area in Manchuria threatened Russia. In February 1895, the Russian government decided to negotiate with the powers in order to force Japan to relinquish Liaotung. France, as Russia's ally, promptly agreed to go along; Germany, which had a hidden scheme of its own, also gave her consent; England, however, refused.<sup>40</sup> On April 20, the Triplice, consisting of Russia, Germany, and France, presented Japan with a note demanding the restoration of Liaotung to China. The Russian note informed Japan:

The Government of His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russians, in examining the conditions of the peace which Japan has imposed on China, finds that the possession of the Peninsula of Liaotung, claimed by Japan, would be a constant menace to the capital of China, would at the same time render illusory the independence of Korea, and would henceforth be a perpetual obstacle to the peace of the Far East.

Consequently the Government of His Majesty the Emperor would give a new proof of their sincere friendship for the Government of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan by advising him to renounce the definite possession of the Peninsula of Liaotung.<sup>41</sup> Japan did not reply immediately. However, the Japanese General Staff realized that Japan could not fight the combined forces of the Triplice, and yielded to the demand on May 8, 1895.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, Russo-Japanese relations began to deteriorate, and Russia emerged as the savior and protector of China.

### 5.4 The implication for Russia

The success of the Triplice was a triumph of Russian policy. Russia won all her short-term aims. After the Sino-Japanese War, the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and the retro cession of

<sup>37</sup> Han, p. 411.

<sup>38</sup> Romanov, B., *Rossiia v Manchzhurii* (Leningrad, 1928), p. 63., citing Dallin, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> British Documents on the Origin of the War, Vol. I. London. Report dated March 26, 1898.

<sup>40</sup> Dallin, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Tschirsky to German Foreign Office, April 20, 1895, G.P., IX, 271; Gerard, op. cit., pp. 43-44; Akagi, op. cit., pp. 162-163., citing Malozemoff, p. 66., and Dallin, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Akagi, op. cit., pp. 164-165.

Lading, Russia adopted an active policy in the Far East for the first time since 1860. Before 1895, Russia had been content with the *status quo* because no power had entered her security zone- Korea, Manchuria and neighboring areas.<sup>43</sup> Whenever Russia attempted to obtain an ice-free port, it was more of a counter-move to activities of other nations and was aimed at more forcing those powers to retract their claims than obtaining a port for herself.<sup>44</sup> However, after 1895 Russia began to take strong measures in the Far East. First, the problem of whether to rely on China or Japan was settled by the enmity aroused in Japan because of the actions of the Triplice. Secondly, the importance of obtaining an ice-free port was now more clearly envisaged with the increase of Russian naval power in the Far East. Finally, as discussed before, the need for a railroad to the Far East became closely associated with the defense of the Amur river frontier.<sup>45</sup>

For Russia, the main effect of the Sino-Japanese war was the chance to take advantage of China's resulting weakness. The areas of China bordering on Russia now appeared to constitute a power vacuum which Russian men and material had to fill- just as they had been for several decades filling the spaces of Central Asia. This Russian drive into Manchuria, Mongolia, and Korea was certain to arouse British enmity, but Britain was far away and the risk was well worth taking so long as China could be counted upon to offer no resistance and so long as Japan seemed too weak to interfere. Russia was still inclined to minimize the extent of the Japanese victories. The traditional view that little Japan was a negligible power compared with giant Russia continued to prevail there.<sup>46</sup>

## 6. RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN KOREA AND RUSSO-JAPANESE RIVALRY FOLLOWING 1895

### 6.1 Preeminence

Following the defeat in 1895 China was compelled to relinquish all claims to Korea, and Japan remained in actual control of Korea. Modernization and reforms were proclaimed at Japan's behest; opposition to Japanese influence was suppressed. The Queen of Korea, opposed to Japanese rule and reform, was assassinated, and the King, fearing for his life, took refuge in the Russian legation in Seoul.<sup>47</sup>

Events began to take a course which had not been anticipated in Tokyo. Russia sought to push the Japanese out of Korea and establish her own protectorate there. Tokyo had hoped to obtain control of Korea by defeating China before Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway was completed. By its victory, however, Japan had provoked Russian penetration of Korea, where until 1894 it had faced a weak China. Now China was out of the game, but Russia replaced her as a new and even stronger rival of Japan in Korea.

From the beginning of their rivalry, Russia and Japan showed discord. For the first time in history, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was suggested - by the Japanese - as a borderline dividing Korea

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<sup>43</sup> Pyong Do Yi. *Kook SaDae Kwan* (Seoul: Pyo Moon Kak, 1955), pp. 549-50.

<sup>44</sup> Malozemoff, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dallin, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup> Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue*, pp. 531-574.

into two foreign protectorates. Lobanov-Rostovsky, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, rejected the plan. Then the Japanese proposed a joint proclamation of the independence of Korea. Lobanov-Rostovsky turned down this offer, too. The agreement concluded was rather narrow in scope; it was supplemented a few months later by a new protocol between Lobanov and the Japanese envoy, Yamagata. Both powers were thereby entitled to keep a limited number of troops in Korea (800 Russians and 1,000 Japanese). Russia did not live up to the agreement, however, and the following year a considerable number of Russian officers were dispatched to reconstruct and train the Korean Army.<sup>48</sup>

At the beginning of 1896, Russia began to influence Korea significantly. The Japanese assassination of the Queen of Korea was turning point for Russia to become a major contender in Korean affairs. At three o'clock on the morning of October 8, 1895, Japanese soldiers and criminals ransacked the Queen's palace. When they found her, they immediately stabbed her. She was carried, dying, into the courtyard and there, even before she was fully dead, her assassins poured kerosene over her body and set it aflame, to hide the evidence of how she had been killed.<sup>49</sup> After this incidence, anti-Japanese movement was prevalent throughout the country. The Korean King himself had to seek for foreign aid to check Japan's influence in Korea. And he took refuge to the Russian legation. After the King had moved to the Russian legation, the pro-Japanese ministers in the Korean government who could not flee in time were massacred with brutality by anger-driven masses<sup>50</sup> and the Japanese political influence in Korea decreased.

The new Russian envoy, Alexis Speyer, who arrived in Seoul in January, 1896, soon came to exert influence in Korean affairs. The Korean King, who remained at the Russian legation from February, 1896, to February, 1897, was made a tool of Speyer's policy. King Kojong signed laws abolishing all the reforms proclaimed at the request of the Japanese. The War Department in St. Petersburg detailed a plan for a Korean Army of 250,000 under officers of the Imperial Russian Army. At the coronation of the new Tsar, in May, 1896, Nicholas II received a humble request from King Kojong - who was still in Russian custody - that Korea be placed under Russian protection. The Tsar granted the request and only through the intervention of his Minister for Foreign Affairs was this weighty and potentially dangerous decision revoked.<sup>51</sup>

In February, 1897, King Kojong returned to his palace, but the informal Russian protectorate remained in effect and Russian influence continued to increase. More than 60 Russian instructors worked with the Korean armed forces. Industrial concessions, including important lumber concessions at the Tumen River and in the Yalu Valley, were granted to Russian companies. A mining concession in Hamgyong Province was also granted. Moreover, Russia and Korea agreed to the construction of telegraph lines connecting them. A Russian - language school had already been founded in Seoul the previous April with the help of a Russian officer.<sup>52</sup> Upon the advice of the Russian envoy, King Kojong assumed the title of Emperor in order to underscore his complete sovereignty: As if in anticipation of political theories of the 1940's, to the Russian envoy national sovereignty meant independence from

<sup>48</sup> Dallin, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Han, p. 431.

<sup>50</sup> Clarence N. Weems ed., Hulbert's History of Korea. (2 vols., Hillary House Publishers Ltd., 1962), pp. 303-307.

<sup>51</sup> Rosen, Roman., Forty Years of Diplomacy. London, 1922., pp. 125, 140.

<sup>52</sup> Han, p. 435.

all nations but Russia.<sup>53</sup> A friendly government was established in September, 1897. And a report to St. Petersburg informed the Tsar's ministers that the Korean Council of Ministers was headed by a person devoted to Russia.<sup>54</sup>

## 6.2 Recession

Nevertheless, Russia's strong position in Korea was based on prestige rather than power. There were neither considerable troops nor naval vessels to support the aggressive, sometimes arrogant, steps taken by the Russian envoy. His activities aroused protests; ministers chose to resign rather than accept certain of his more extreme demands. Basking in his overconfidence, Speyer, in March, 1898, asked for the elimination of a number of persons in the Korean Government who opposed Russian interests, and threatened that in case of refusal, Russia would withdraw her military instructors from Korea. He was astounded when the King decided against him. The demands were rejected, and the Russian officers were forced to quit. The Russian -Korean Bank, established a short time before, was closed. Although Russia did not commit herself to the hands-off policy in Korea in the Nishi - Rosen Convention of April 1898, Russia virtually retreated from the Korean Scene. In other words, Russian influence in Korea diminished.<sup>55</sup>

Why did Russian influence in Korea become so weak? First of all, Russia's withdrawal from Korea was a direct consequence of her nonobservance of the principle of cautious maneuvering which, at least until the turn of the century, had been found to be obligatory for her.<sup>56</sup> In other word, there was no evidence for any immediate Russian design to improve her lot in Korea. Moreover, Russian control over Korea collapsed like a house of cards. In St. Petersburg there was the division between the policymakers regarding Korean problem. The scholar, Romanov, for example, considers Korea not to have been regarded as one of Russia's significant national interests and implies that it could have been dispensed with. However, the archives in European Russia may be misleading on that point; the situation on the ground suggests that it was a vital national objective.

Secondly, the attention of Russian government was gradually shifting to southern Manchuria; the acquisition of ports and areas now occupied the minds and labor of men in and around the Tsar's court.<sup>57</sup> Thirdly, Speyer, the aggressive Russian Minister at Seoul, was replaced by the more easy-going Matiunin.

Despite the publicity, much of it inspired by Japan, on Russia's aggressive intentions in Korea, actual events and statistics failed to substantiate such allegations. The series of Russian conferences from February to August, 1903 had definitely ruled out aggression in regard to Korea. They had even ruled out further government financial participation in the Yalu enterprise which was the only active Russian concession in Korea.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>53</sup> Dallin, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 49

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 50

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>58</sup> The conferences took place on March 26, and May 7 1903. On March 26, 1903, a conference was held to discuss the advisability of transforming the Yalu concession into a strictly commercial stockholders' company. Present were Witte, Lamsdorff, Plehve, Kuropatkin and Abza, the Tsar's personal representative. The ministers mentioned the potential international complications, but no

Russia had the smallest number of citizens residing in Korea, smaller than even Great Britain or the United States. The Russian Church hardly had any members or Korean converts.<sup>59</sup>

In 1903, fearing the growth of Japanese influence in Korea, the Russian Minister in Seoul occasionally protested some phases of the expansion of Japanese influence. He protested the appointment of Kato, a Japanese, as adviser to the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Industry- a position that would give Japan strongest influence in the financial councils of the country. However, this appointment went through over the Russian protest. Either the protests were not strongly presented or Russia was not sufficiently interested in the matter. Russia considered Japanese domination of Korea a foregone conclusion. Pavlov, the Russian Minister, was not very much interested in Korea, because he believed that Russia should expand in the direction of China. There was another possible reason for his disinterest. According to the American Minister to Seoul, Pavlov became infatuated and married a teenage girl in the winter of 1903-1904 and thereafter did not attend to his duties.<sup>60</sup>

### 6.3 Japan as a rival

On the other hand, Japan never ceased to increase her influence in Korea, not only in non-political fields but also in political matters, despite the temporary recess of political influence in 1895 and 1896. Japan's economic penetration into Korea was significant. There were twenty branches of Japanese banks in Seoul and the treaty ports. The Daiichi Bank of Japan had become virtually the central bank of Korea, handling customs duties, purchasing gold and silver, controlling government loans, managing the treasury and issuing currency. There were 210 Japanese firms operating in Korea by 1896, whereas firms of all other foreign countries combined amounted to only forty-eight. In 1903, the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs was able to announce officially that:

Japan possessed paramount political as well as commercial and industrial interests and influences in Korea, which, having regard to her security, she cannot consent to share with any power.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, no other power had as much as interest in Korea in 1903 as did Japan. Japan was the most powerful country in the Great Game in Korea during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Forty to fifty percent of the annual budget went to the military, while Japan took advantage of the shifting alliances and conflicts among the great powers to obtain loans, equipment and expert advice in a wide variety of technical fields.<sup>62</sup>

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one took a strong stand against Bezobrazov. They only insisted that it become strictly private with foreign and state treasury capital severely limited. On this basis a statute was drafted, which was confirmed on May 31. On May 7, 1903, another conference was called, including Lamsdorff, Witte, Sakharov representing Kuropatkin, Plehve, Bezobrazov, Abaza, and Vogak, who had been recalled from China to manage the Yalu enterprise. They discussed the report that Japan was preparing for war, and the question of withdrawal from the Yalu. The concession granted the Russian an exclusive right to cut timber on the Korean side of the watershed of the Yalu and Tuman rivers, the two rivers making the border line between the Korean peninsula and Manchuria., Malozemoff, pp. 177-185.

<sup>59</sup> Malozemoff, p. 231.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>61</sup> Asakawa, Kanichi. *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Cause and Issues*. (Boston & New York: Houghton, and Mifflin, 1904)., pp. 296-297.

<sup>62</sup> Han, p. 436.

In the Japanese assertion of her paramount interests and influence in Korea, she refused to see that Russia had any matching interests in Manchuria. Japan not only wanted to dominate Korea all by herself, but also she desired Manchuria for future expansion. Such Japanese ambitions were revealed in the second part of Article III of the four Japanese proposals to Russia on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War. Japan demanded that Russia should not impede with the eventual extension of the Korean railway into southern Manchuria so as to connect with the Eastern Chinese and Shanhaikwan-Newchwang lines. Furthermore, in 1903 Japan demanded that Russia conclude another Nishi-Rosen agreement- whereby both powers reaffirmed Korea's independence and pledged noninterference in its internal affairs in 1898- with her concerning Manchuria.<sup>63</sup>

Russia was willing to recognize the existing Japanese rights and interests in Korea but was unwilling to admit that Japan had any rights whatsoever in Manchuria. Russia actually demanded that Japan recognize the fact that Russia had the same rights and interests in Manchuria as Japan had in Korea. However, Japan did not yield and continued to show her interests toward Manchuria. It seems very probable, therefore, that the immediate cause of Russo-Japanese War lay in Manchuria as much as it did in Korea.

## 7. THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR IN 1905

### 7.1 Backdrop and Progress

The Russo-Japanese war was not simply a war between Japan and Russia; it was a war fought over the Russian occupation of Chinese territory, using Korea as one of the zones of operations. Japan struck Russia without warning, just as she had struck China ten years before. On February 8, 1904, Japanese ships opened fire on Port Arthur, bottling up the Russian fleet at anchor there. War was officially declared on the tenth. The Korean government immediately declared complete neutrality, but neutrality was totally ignored by Japan. Japanese troops landed at Inchon, a Korean harbor near Seoul and immediately marched into Seoul.<sup>64</sup> In response to the Korean government's complaint, Komura Jutaro Japanese Foreign Minister stated on 26 September 1905 that it was unpropitious and also very untimely to discuss warfare and neutrality now.<sup>65</sup> Japan simply intended to use Korea as a military base in her war with Russia, and to this end would also deprive the nation of its sovereignty by taking control of foreign relations. When the war went favorably for Japan, she took the further step of abrogating all agreements between Korea and Russia and depriving all concessions granted to Russians.

Japan inflicted a series of decisive defeats on Russia. In March of 1905 the important Manchurian city of Mukden fell. In a desperate attempt to tip the balance, Russia sent her Baltic fleet all the way to Asia. It was denied the use of the Suez Canal by Britain and had to sail around Africa to reach its destination. It had hardly arrived when, however, it was blown to pieces by the Japanese navy off Tsushima Island in the Korea Strait. After this, Russian capitulation was only a matter of time, and Korean independence was doomed. And finally,

<sup>63</sup> Dallin, p. 49, and Malosemoff, pp. 239-247.

<sup>64</sup> Han, p. 445.

<sup>65</sup> NGB 37/I, no. 700., citing Nish, p. 214.

in July of 1905 Russia admitted defeat and consented to begin peace negotiations.<sup>66</sup>

## 7.2 The cause of the War: Korean question

One might argue that the Russo-Japanese war was a preventable war into Russians slid unconsciously.<sup>67</sup> This is easy to suggest; but it is difficult to imagine an acceptable solution to the problems at issue short of near surrender by Russia. Neither sides were willing to give up their claims. Russia's reticence to yield Korea to Japan entirely, indicates how the issues surrounding the causes of the war were tense between the two countries.

Over the basic problem of Korea, the Japanese defined their position very clearly. In the cabinet resolution of 30 December 1903, it was agreed: It is inevitable that we should keep Korea under our thumb by force whatever happens but, as it is desirable for us, if possible, to justify our actions, we should try to conclude an offensive-defensive alliance with the Koreans or a treaty for their protection as was done during our war with China (1894-1895). We have been taking steps to prepare the ground for such treaties and will continue to do so in the future. Our Korean policy, in short, depends either directly or indirectly, on conducting military operations and must be determined in accordance with military criteria.<sup>68</sup>

While no mention of Russian activities is made in this resolution, it is clear that Japan wanted supremacy in the peninsula and would only achieve it by removing Russian influence from the court and the territory as a whole.

On the other hand, it is very difficult to define the Russian position on Korea because it was a subject of divided opinions. In St. Petersburg there was the division between the policymakers regarding Korean problem. The scholar, Romanov, considers Korea not to have been regarded as one of Russia's significant national interests and implies that it could have been dispensed with. However, the archives in European Russia may be misleading on that point; the situation on the ground suggests that it was a vital national objective.<sup>69</sup>

## 7.3 Why did Japan win the War?

There were few who had believed that this small nation, almost unknown to the world, would be able to beat Russia. Japan had displayed a high degree of military preparedness, efficiency, and technical skill, and her admirals and generals proved to be not inferior to the military leaders of Europe. The Japanese intelligence service was amazingly efficient, and Japanese espionage work in Russia during the war was most thorough. Japan spent 120 million yen (about 10 percent of her budget) for intelligence work in Russia.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, Russia lacked military efficiency. She had no definite strategical plan; her generals and officers displayed insufficient interest in the operations. The one-track Siberian railroad was constantly jammed, and the chaotic situation impeded the transport of troops and supplies from Europe. A series of commercial scandals occurred in connection

<sup>66</sup> Han, pp. 446-447.

<sup>67</sup> S. Gwynn (ed.) *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice*, vol. 1, p. 405.

<sup>68</sup> Gwynn, op. cit., p. 405.

<sup>69</sup> Nish, p. 254

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Alexander Votinov, *Yaponskikh pionazh v russko-yaponskuyu voinu 1904-1905*. (Moscow, 1939), citing Dallin, pp. 78-79.



with war supplies. The quality of military matériel was inferior, due to the deep network of bribery surrounding the War Department.<sup>71</sup>

As far as the Russian population was concerned, the war with Japan was one of the most unpopular in Russian history. In the very first weeks of the war, the government attempted to organize patriotic demonstrations in the cities. These, however, were no more than processions of small groups, guarded by police, with a few government officials carrying a large picture of the Tsar at the head. The Tsar himself traveled over the country to greet the regiments departing for the Far East; his presence, however, did not evoke any great enthusiasm, particularly when the news of the defeats became known.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, Japan's population of 45 million was mentally prepared for war against Russia. The Press and through it the public had a fair idea of the negotiations which had been proceeding and were much more bellicose than the government. Indeed, the ministry had to restrain the people from its enthusiasm for war by painting a deceptively favorable impression of the progress which negotiations were making.<sup>73</sup>

#### 7.4 The nature of the War

In its origins, the Russo-Japanese War stands in interesting contrast to other modern wars. It was not the result of economic pressures, for example the scarcity of resources for the number of people. Japan indeed suffered from a shortage of raw materials and a rapidly growing population. Both Korea and Manchuria were sought for raw materials and a rapidly growing population. Japan was not in a state of social disintegration and was seeking war as a way of diverting attention from domestic problems. In 1904, there was no appeal to xenophobia or nationalism or war-lust on the part of the Japanese people in order to deflect them from thoughts of poverty, revolution or political discontent. In contrast, Russia was in a state of social disintegration. But there is no evidence that this prompted the tsar to look to war as a way of uniting the nation. A war in far-off Manchuria did not initially have much impact on European Russia. While the war became popular in Japan, there is little evidence that it ever was in Russia.<sup>74</sup>

The war broke out mainly because of strategic considerations. The factors which seem to have weighed most were security and fear of armament policies on the part of the other party.<sup>75</sup> Both countries had increased their military and naval strength over a decade. The Japanese feared the increase in Russian military and naval build-up in east Asia since 1900, especially after the Siberian railway came into operation. It directly threatened their own interests there. Russians also concerned Japan's military growth but the general reaction of the Russian military seems to have been to discount her army and navy. And finally Russian ignorance led to its defeat in the war.

Another intriguing aspect regarding the Russo-Japanese war lies with the question of alliance. Even though the war was not a world war, it had repercussions throughout the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Nish, p. 244.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

world. Though the outside powers were not belligerents, they were surely involved.<sup>76</sup> The war took place at the height of the secret alliances in world history. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to imagine that the Franco-Russian alliance or the Anglo-Japanese alliance caused the war. The European allies of the Russo-Japanese conflicts were the main external supporters of their allies but did not exercise control over them in either case. There is no doubt that Anglo-Japanese alliance indeed narrowed the scope of any war. In other words, Japan somewhat benefited from Anglo-Japanese alliance. Japan feared most of all the reappearance of the Russo-German-French coalition of 1895. However, it was prevented by the British alliance and the Anglo-French *ententes*. Japan could make the decision to go to war with a fair prospect of a straightforward two-party conflict. The events of 1895 with which this study began hung like a cloud over the events of 1904.<sup>77</sup>

### 7.5 Implication for Korea

With regard to Korea, which had been the main bone of contention between Russia and Japan on the eve of the war, Japan scored a total victory. The victory over Russia gave Japan substantial recognition of taking control of Korea exclusively from other great powers. Even before the war had ended, Tokyo had secured Britain's acknowledgment of Japan's paramount political, military, and economic interests in Korea. By the treaty of August 12, 1905, Britain recognized the right of Japan to take such measures of guidance, control, and protection of Korea as she may deem proper and necessary.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly the United States concluded an unpublicized agreement (A recorded conversation between Secretary William Taft and Premier Count Katsura) by which Japan pledged not to harbor any aggressive designs against the Philippines, while the United States agreed to Japanese suzerainty over Korea. Later President Theodore Roosevelt assured Tokyo that the reorganization of Korea by the Japanese would meet no opposition from the United States.<sup>79</sup>

At the peace treaty of Portsmouth, Russia was compelled to recognize the paramount political, military, and economic interests of Japan in Korea; Russia agreed not to interfere or place obstacles in the way of any measure of direction or protection and supervision that the Imperial Government of Japan may deem necessary to adopt in Korea.<sup>80</sup>

Most importantly, it was agreed that the sovereignty of Korea should not be mentioned in any international treaty, effectively leading to public acknowledgment of Japanese control over Korean foreign relations. Consequently, Japan now had guarantees from three of the world's great powers to do as she liked with Korea. The Korean people, against their will and without being consulted, came under the rule of Japan at least partly by a conspiracy of Western nations. It was a proceeding that did honor to none of the parties to it.

As a result of the war, Russian power was reduced and Japan emerged as the strongest power of the Far East. Japan owed her successes in large part to the support of Britain and America. Yet her ambitions went far beyond her wartime accomplishments.

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<sup>76</sup> Nish, p.2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>78</sup> Dallin, p. 86.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

## 8. RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN KOREA FOLLOWING THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

After the War, Russia almost lost all of its privileges in Korea. The new Russian Consul General after the war, Plancon, arrived with credentials to the Korean government, but the Japanese forced the Russians to draft him new credentials to the Japanese government before allowing him to assume his position.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the decline in the number of Russian residents in Korea explicitly demonstrated the collapse of Russian influence in Korea. After the war there remained only the necessary consular personnel and missionaries.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, various Russo-Korean treaties and agreements were canceled, including the lease. The Russian Government, through their Consul General at Seoul asked the Japanese Resident General to have returned 50,000 yen which had been paid for that concession, inclusive of adjacent lands bought by Russian private citizens. Since the site of these buildings was regarded as important for Korean and Japanese defences, the Resident General, after consulting with the Japanese Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Navy and Army, entered into negotiations on the subject. On April 19, 1909, the Russian government was reimbursed and thereupon relinquished all claims connected with the Masanpo land. After consultation with the Korean government, the land was turned over to the Accounts Department of the Japanese Garrison Army in Korea.<sup>83</sup>

## 9. CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Assessment of Russia's performance during the Great Game in Korea

Like the other great powers, Russia acquired territory, and controlled where it could, but in East Asia it was less the initiator of events than their exploiter. Russia was drawn into situations as much as it actively pushed its way into them, and generally was more occupied with defensive than with offensive measures. The colonization of the eastern regions proved more difficult and less profitable than anticipated. In particular, Russia had reduced her pace to a jog on the Korean track.<sup>84</sup> Russia did not want to lead for fear of initiating changes with which it was not prepared to cope.<sup>85</sup>

Russian foreign policy in the Far East was hamstrung by the inability of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Navy, and War to agree on common objectives in the Far East. While the Foreign Ministry aimed above all at avoiding an armed conflict with Great Britain or Japan, the Finance Ministry aspired to preserve an entente with China in order to develop Russo-Chinese commerce. The Navy Ministry's priority was a naval base, while the General Staff was more concerned with the development and security of the Russian possessions

<sup>81</sup> Nelson, M. Frederick. *Korea and the Old Orders in Eastern Asia* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1945), p. 276.

<sup>82</sup> His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Residency General, *The Second Annual Report on the Reforms and Progress in Korea* (Seoul; 1908), p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> The Government General of Chosen. *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen (Korea)* (1910-1911), Seoul; December, 1911., p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue*, p. 836.

<sup>85</sup> Lensen, pp. 835-837.

along the Amur River.<sup>86</sup>

## 9.2 Why did Russia fail in Korea?

Russian policy in Korea eventually failed miserably. Despite the time and energy devoted to the problem of Korea by Russian statesmen Russia failed to gain more than temporary advantage in Korea. Why?

First, Russian policy toward Korea was not consistent throughout the whole Game. The methods and speed with which they attempted to achieve their ends varied with the faction in power. For instance, in 1895 Russia was fortunate enough to have in Seoul a representative who understood the best way to influence Korea, through intrigue and individuals. Simultaneously, Russian statesmen seemed to be following a wait- and -see policy, with no strong demands. It was at this time that Russia made its greatest gains in Korea. On the other hand, the Russian Minister of Finances, Witte's policy toward Korea was rather hesitant. This was the beginning of Russia's downfall in Korea. Furthermore, the endless debate between a retired captain of Chevalier Guards, Bezobrazov's expansionist faction that wished to build a Far Eastern Empire based on Korea and his opponents who preferred a more cautious course, clearly indicates again how Russia's policy toward Korea was inconsistent.

Second, the imperialistic moves of the Russians, their demands, and their neglect of promised aid lost them the support of Koreans of all classes, except for a few corrupt politicians. The good will which they gained by aiding King Kojong in 1896 was evaporated needlessly. They had no strong and sympathetic group of Koreans to aid Russian projects such as the Soviets created half a century later.

Third, although as a geographic entity Russia was one of Korea's closest neighbors, Russia as a state was located too far away from Korea. While telegraphic communications between Korea and Moscow were reasonably efficient, they were at the mercy of the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. Transportation of personnel and military equipment was slow and inconsistent. The territory between Korea and European Russia was sparsely settled. There was no efficient way for Russia to build up sufficient military strength in the Far East to assure control of Korea.

Fourth, the matter of the long distance between the two countries also led to the lack of commercial enterprise in Korea. Russia could not take advantage of commercial basis, unlike other powers used it as basis for their political pretensions. For example, the lumber concession, besides being primarily political, was essential neither to the Koreans nor to the Russians. Trade between the two countries was almost negligible.

While Russia was struggling under difficulties both natural and self-created, Japan had none of these problems. Japan was the most successful contender in the Great Game in Korea. Its new Army had continued to defeat its major rivals: China in 1895 and Russia in 1904. Its power lay but a short distance from Korea. It controlled most of the Korean trade, and had numerous settlements in Korea.

Imperial Russia was in decline; the symptoms were evident in Korea as elsewhere. In my opinion, her failures in Korea and the Far East helped to hasten her collapse. If the Tsar had been strong enough to take a firm position on what Russia really did want from Korea, and keep his subordinates in line, rather than swaying with the most persuasive, catastrophe might

<sup>86</sup> Moulin to Billot, no. 1531, St. Petersburg, Mar. 27, 1898, Confidential, DDF, ser. 1, 14: 166-70., citing Lensen, p. 839.

have been avoided. However such was not the case. Throughout the Great Game in Korea, the Russian bear was used as a bugbear by the various powers to intimidate and contain their rivals or to justify their own moves in the international balance of intrigue.

### 9.3 Final Lesson for Today

The Great Game which took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century tosses a number of caveats for today's international relations in East Asia. Clearly almost one century later, the new Great Game is taking place over the Korean Peninsula. The main casts in this game were clearly replaced by different members of surrounding states. Nonetheless, the situation is more serious and more complicated over the divided Korean Peninsula. The lack of leadership and the unconfident desire for pursuing ambiguously independent diplomacy by top leadership from the South Korean perspective, and unsettled nuclear proliferation threat by the North Korean side, the tense US- China balance of power relations, all make the geopolitics in the Korean Peninsula even worse than almost once century ago. In other words, King Kojong's initial attempts and strategy of being neutral between Japan and Russia somehow resemble South Korea's ambivalent stance between China's Belt and Road Initiative and the US led Indo- Pacific Strategy. The outcome of Kojong's policy turned out quite miserable because it finally ended up with Korea's loosing national sovereignty to Japan for the first time ever in Korea's history. The timing was too late for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Korea to turn its clock back to prior to Japan's annexation. This is also similar to Chinese Qing dynasty's invasion to Chosun in 1636. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the leadership of Chosun Dynasty was clearly lacking in strategic thinking amid balancing relations between Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty. It is important to understand that historically Korea's failure of balancing two great powers created national disaster. It is crucially important for the leadership of Korea to remember theory and diplomatic realities are completely two different caveats of international relations.

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*Se Hyun Ahn*  
*Professor of the Department of International Relations*  
*University of Seoul*

*Seoulsiripdaero 163*  
*Dongdaemun-gu*  
*Seoul 02504*  
*02-6490-2045*  
*010-5492-9207*